Expanded Learning Time (ELT)

What is Expanded Learning Time?

Expanded Learning Time involves increasing the amount of time students spend in school. According the Elena Rocha, an Education Consultant, elementary and middle schools implement ELT more often than high schools. Charter schools are the leaders in implementing ELT because they have more autonomy and so can pursue innovative strategies, including expanding both the school day and school year. “This existing school calendar […] is insufficient for 21st century learning,” Rocha said, “ELT is gaining momentum across the United States.” ELT programs give schools the opportunity to “re-imagine the school day” and provide students with the time, enrichment, and instruction they need to meet today’s high academic standards (Citizen Schools, 2015). Schools that adopt expanded learning time significantly extend their schedules for all students by lengthening the school day, school year, or both. Inner-city urban school districts are adding more time to support struggling schools.

Expanded learning time refers to any educational program or strategy intended to increase the amount of time students are learning, especially for the purpose of improving academic achievement and test scores, or reducing learning loss, learning gaps, and achievement gaps. For this reason, expanding learning time could be considered a de facto reform strategy, since expanding learning time is typically needed or proposed only when students are not performing or achieving at expected levels (Glossary of Education Reform 2014).

While expanded learning time may take a wide variety of forms form state to state or school to school, the following is a representative list of a few widely used strategies (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014):

* **Expanded school years** add to the number of days students are required to attend school. While states generally determine a minimum number of required attendance days, districts and schools may also independently elect to increase the number of days in their school year.
* **Expanded school days and school weeks** are also used as a strategy to for increasing the amount of time students receive instruction from teachers and other educators; participate in learning activities in such as clubs, competitions, and performances; learn through nontraditional learning pathways, such as internships and apprenticeships; or receive academic support from educators and specialists. Moving from half-day to full-day kindergarten is one example, but public schools may also add an hour or more onto the customary duration of a school day.
* **Increasing or supplementing instructional time during the regular school day** is another common way that educators might expand learning time for students. For example, schools may eliminate study halls and replace them with academic courses, tutoring sessions, or other forms of academic support. States or schools may also increase course and credit requirements for graduation, which require students to take more courses in particular subject areas (mathematics or science).
* **Summer school, winter sessions, school-break programs, and summer-bridge programs** are other strategies that states, districts, or schools can use to expand learning time for students. By requiring or offering additional learning opportunities during school breaks –usually the longer summer, fall, winter and spring breaks –schools can support students who have fallen behind academically and accelerate their learning progress. This helps to prevent students from slipping into the “summer slide” and increases students’ retention rate.
* **Before-school programs and after-school programs**are school-run or school-affiliated learning opportunities that happen before or after regular schools hours, usually for the purposes of supporting or supplementing student learning.

Why Expanded Learning Time?

Education experts have long recognized that expanding learning time beyond the traditional 180 six-hour days should be part of improving public education, but until recently there has been little movement on this important issue. This is changing. There is a growing momentum for more time in school. The Center for American Progress and its partners’ Massachusetts 2020 and the National Center on Time & Learning are the pioneers in expanded learning time. According to Rocha (2007), expanded time is just one strategy with the potential to boost student achievement. It considers time as a resource and capitalizes on the best uses of learning time while expanding it (p.3). Rocha (2007) believes that this approach provides schools with added flexibility to exercise innovation in a very deliberate manner (p.3).

**Debate**

Implementing expanded learning time throughout a state system of public education, or even within an individual district or school, can have complicated and far-reaching implications, which can give rise to criticism and debate. For example, expanded learning time requires significant changes in school operations, scheduling, and transportation, which can increase associated costs –from bus fuel, heating, and lighting to staffing, compensations, and benefits –and have a significant effect on school budgets, particularly during times when funding is being tight. And since teaching contracts typically stipulate the number of hours teachers are required or allowed to teach each week, extending the length of school days and years will usually have implications for collective-bargaining negotiations, contractual agreements, and additional stipends.

Another source of debate is whether learning time in public schools actually leads to improvements in student learning and academic achievement. If the additional time is not meaningfully, purposefully, or effectively utilized, schools may increase costs, complicate operations, and upset teachers and unions without realizing the desired benefits in student learning. In addition, while research studies have provided evidence that expanded learning time can lead to improvements in student learning and academic achievement, some observers have pointed out that some of the world’s highest-performing educational systems, notably Finland’s, have shorter school days and years than public schools in the United States, which suggests, in the view of some critics, that improving student achievement is more about quality than quantity (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2014).

References:

Citizen Schools (2015) Expanded learning time. Retreived <http://www.citizenschools.org/about/education-reform/expanded-learning-time/>

Expanded learning time (2014). In S. Abbott (Ed.), The glossary of education reform. Great Schools Partners. Retrieved from [http://edglossary.org/expanded-learning- time/](http://edglossary.org/expanded-learning-%09time/)

Rocha, E (2007). Choosing more time for students: the what, why and how of expanded learning. *Center for American Progress.* Washington DC. Retrieved <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-> content/uploads/issues/2007/08/pdf/expanded\_learning.pdf

**Success Story: Clarence Edwards Middle School, Boston MA**

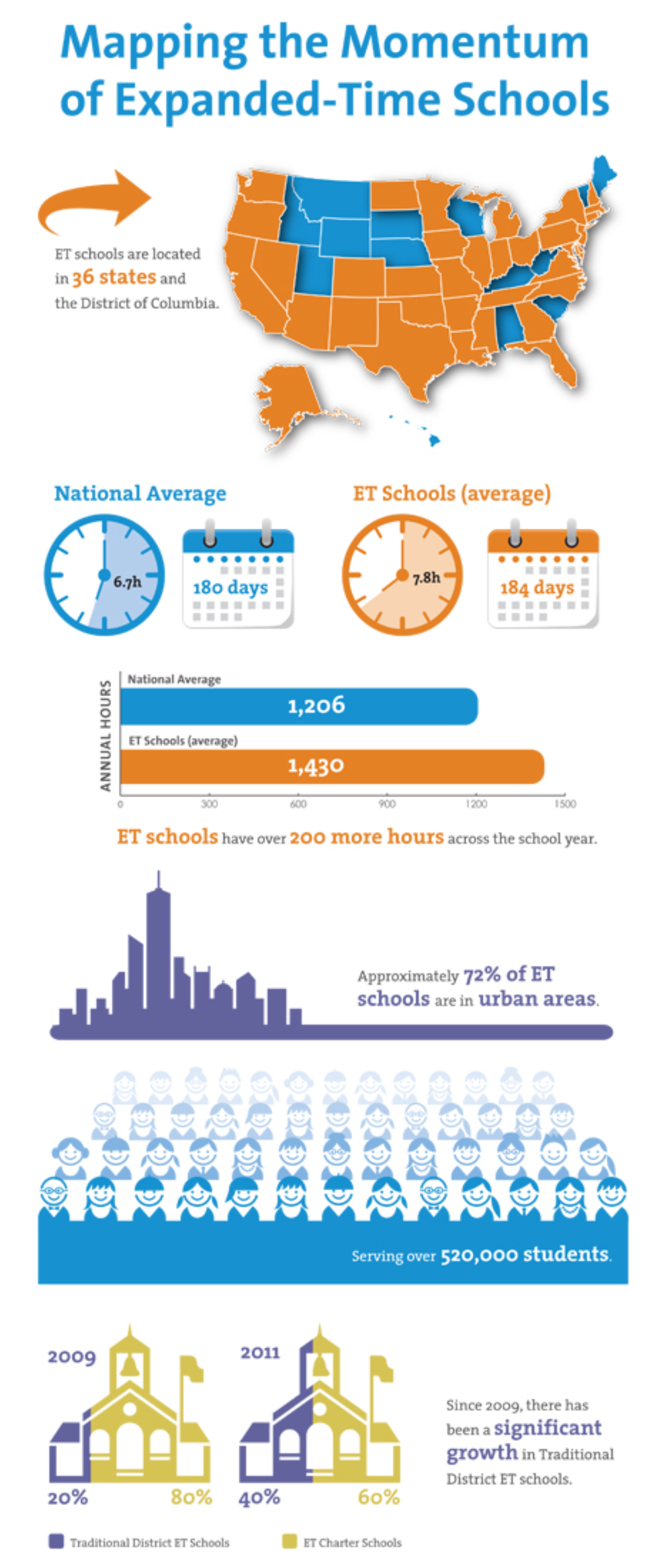
[**http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/edwardscasestudy.pdf**](http://www.timeandlearning.org/files/edwardscasestudy.pdf)

**Additional resources for Expanded Learning Time (ELT)**

National Center on Time & Leaning[**www.timeandlearning.org**](http://www.timeandlearning.org)

Massachusetts 2020 [**www.mass2020.org**](http://www.mass2020.org)

Citizen Schools[**www.citizenschools.org**](http://www.citizenschools.org)



**Source: National Center on Time & Learning Expanded-Time Schools Database (January 2012)**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLWLOealkPI**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLWLOealkPI)

[**https://www.youtube.com/user/NCTL2020**](https://www.youtube.com/user/NCTL2020)